

THE  
TEMPER,  
CHARACTER,  
AND  
DUTY  
OF A  
MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL,

A  
SERMON.

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**1 TIM. iv. 16.**

**TAKE HEED UNTO THYSELF, AND UNTO THY  
DOCTRINE, AND CONTINUE IN THEM, FOR IN  
DOING THIS, THOU SHALT BOTH SAVE THY-  
SELF, AND THEM THAT HEAR THEE.**

**T**HE wiser and more considerate part of mankind generally complain of the unsuccessfulness of the gospel, and the low state of religion, notwithstanding the public establishments for religious instruction. It must be acknowledged, that there is but too much reason for the complaint. But on whom must the blame be laid? on the obstinate folly and depravity of the hearers? or on the ignorance, carelessness, and worldly lives of us the teachers? It is in vain either to deny or dissemble the matter; a great share of the blame may justly be charged on ourselves. It certainly then concerns us, greatly concerns us, as we are the established instructors of the rest of mankind, 'to keep ourselves pure from the blood of all men,' by hearkening to this important admonition of the apostle in the words of the text, 'to take heed unto ourselves, and unto our doctrine, to continue in them, for in doing

' this, we shall both save ourselves, and them that hear us.'

In discoursing on this subject, it is hoped, it may not be improper, nor unsuitable to the present occasion, to endeavour, by the divine assistance, in the first place, to explain and illustrate these great rules of the apostle, in the same order, in which they ly in the text: and then, secondly, to consider the motives by which the observation of them is enforced, ' for in doing this, ' thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.'

First, the rule, ' Take heed to thyself.'

1. The meaning of this precept, in the lowest sense of it, is, that those, who profess to be the instructors and guides of the rest of mankind, should take care that their own behaviour be blameless and inoffensive, 1 Tim. iii. 2. ' A bishop must be blameless.' We know the world expects a high pitch of purity from us, and examines our conduct with great severity; therefore we ought to watch over it with equal severity ourselves: and that we may in some measure answer the expectations of the world, let us abstain not only from all evil, but from all appearance of it too; not venturing so much as to approach near the boundary that separates virtue from vice; but in all cases, where there can be any dispute about the precise point where the laudable part ends, and the blameable begins, let us take care to keep ourselves visibly, and to the convic-



tion of all spectators, on the safe side of the disputed limit. If we keep invariably by this rule, we shall be so far from offending against temperance, that we shall be exemplary in it; so far from violating justice, and doing things hard and rigorous, that we shall be ready to yield something even of our undoubted right; so far from being guilty of any indecency in behaviour or discourse, that we shall keep at a distance from every thing liable to the suspicion of it; and so far from exposing ourselves by a levity of carriage unbecoming our function, that we shall rather lean to the safer extreme of gravity and reserve. Nay it may be necessary sometimes that we abstain from things perfectly indifferent in their own nature, when doing otherwise would offend our weaker Christian brethren, destroy our influence, or lessen our power of doing good.

Further, that our conduct may be unexceptionable, we must take heed to what is said or done in our presence, so as never to suffer ourselves to be carried away by a false modesty, or a vicious complaisance, to approve, or seem to approve of what is base and unworthy, even in the company of those who are undoubtedly our superiors; while we shew all due regard to their stations and characters, it must appear, at the same time, that we have a greater regard for truth, virtue, piety, and decency; while we avoid every thing like insolence and pertness, on the one hand, we must keep at the greatest distance from flattery, and

subject cringing on the other: when any subject of discourse is started, that is impious, immoral, or indecent; or when any sentiments are uttered which tend to pollute the imagination, or corrupt the heart, then all prudent methods must be taken to restrain such contagious discourse, by introducing some more innocent or useful topic. Sometimes the licentious conversation may be checked by serious reasoning and grave rebuke, if circumstances allow, and when there is any prospect of good from it: but as this is not to be done at all times, as every company will not bear it, and persons of bad temper will be provoked to proceed to greater outrages, in such cases we may discountenance it, by withdrawing from the company, or by silence. But let it be observed, that it is not every kind of silence that can vindicate us; it must be a significant and expressive silence, that bears strong marks of our inward abhorrence of what is passing.

Perhaps some of my brethren, whose situation and circumstances allow them, and whose real benevolence of heart leads them to be more frequently in mixed company, may think these rules favour too much of preciseness and austerity; and may imagine that they have been so happy in life, as to recommend themselves to the upper part of the world, by abating somewhat of the rigour of them: but they would do well to consider, that very probably they may afterwards find they have been mistaken, and that these very persons to

whom they imagined they were acceptable, inwardly condemn them, and take their own time to exclaim with great vehemency against them, and against the whole order for their sakes. These rules, reverend brethren, relating to our outward behaviour, though they are common and ordinary, and for that very reason apt to be overlooked, yet they are of great importance; for when a minister's life wants that purity and severity of manners, which I have endeavoured to describe, his character can never rise to that dignity of virtue which begets esteem and authority, gives weight to his instructions, and influence to his example.

2. This rule, 'Take heed to thyself,' requires us to take care that our real and inward character be agreeable to our external behaviour already described: we are not to rest satisfied, with an entire blamelessness of outward character, but we must labour with the utmost diligence to acquire those improvements of understanding, and that pitch of purity of heart which will give real worth and dignity to our inward man, and qualify us to fulfill the duties of our important stations with pleasure and success.

In the first place, let us study to acquire those improvements of understanding, which are in a peculiar manner proper to our sacred office, and highly necessary to answer the ends of it. Here it must be our first and chief care, to clear our minds from those mistakes and prejudices which darken them, and hinder us from

perceiving the full worth and excellence of divine things, and from judging justly of the comparative value and importance of the doctrines of religion. This unbiassed state of mind is of great importance; it is this that fits us for searching into the scriptures with fairness and impartiality, that we may thence draw the great doctrines of faith pure and entire, without loading Christianity with what does not belong to it, or giving up any essential or important part of it: it is this too which preserves from an over-fondness for new opinions on the one hand, and from an over-great reverence for long established ones on the other, and leads us to examine disputed points with great silence, suspense, and coolness; untill full enquiry cause truth shine with clearness upon the understanding. But beside an unprejudiced mind, there are other previous qualifications necessary to obtain a thorough acquaintance with the great doctrines of religion, as they are delivered in the scriptures; such as a knowledge of the rules of right reasoning, and of the great principles of natural religion, together with a tolerable acquaintance with the original languages of the sacred authors, and with the history, antiquities, prevailing customs, and ordinary allusions of the respective ages in which they were written: without these previous preparations we cannot hope to reach the true meaning of the sacred books, to explain and illustrate them in a clear and delightful manner, and to judge with just discernment and

aste, of the beauty, propriety and force of their style. To which we may add, that without these previous branches of knowledge, we cannot successfully defend our holy religion against those attacks which are openly made upon it in our age: for it is in the holy scriptures, that the chief evidence of our religion is exhibited to our view; and it is from the wrong translations, false expositions, and scholastic and metaphysical systems wrested from them, that the chief objections against it are drawn.

After having studied the great principles of natural religion and morality, and learned the important truths of Christianity from an honest enquiry into divine revelation, it must be our next care to store our minds with a large treasure of the best moral and divine sentiments: these are the choice furniture of our souls; and from a plentiful store of them we shall find we are both qualified and disposed to teach others in the most instructive and affecting manner: the holy scriptures will furnish us with a rich variety of the purest and sublimest sentiments moral and divine: and in other writers ancient and modern we may find a great number more, or at least the same greatly diversified and set in a thousand beautiful and striking lights. That our minds may be replenished with an abundant store and delightful variety of such thoughts, sentiments and impressions, as the best of mankind have felt and described concerning God, providence, virtue, and every thing



relating to the great interest of mankind, we must gather from all quarters: whether the writers be Christian or Pagan, let us think it our duty to borrow whatever is good and pure, whatever bears the marks of a heart smitten with the love of truth and virtue. But as virtue when displayed in the purest precepts, or best descriptions, has only a faint and languid power over our minds, when compared with what we feel when it appears exerted into action, in the most interesting circumstances of a good man's life: it must be of very great use to us, to be furnished with a large collection of the most uncommon and striking examples of the several moral and divine virtues which are to be found either in sacred or common history: when these are introduced in a proper place, and painted with true simplicity, they can never fail to awaken the attention of the hearers, make deep impressions on their minds, continue rivetted in their memories, and give them the plainest, justest and most engaging view of the great virtues of the Christian life. And that these improvements of understanding may be more useful to the world, we must first endeavour to attain that insight into the make and frame of the human mind, which will point out to us the shortest, most successful and agreeable method of informing the understanding and touching the heart; and then to acquire that knowledge of the world, of the tempers and characters of men, which will direct us how to advise and reprove



without offence, and with just hope of success. There remain many other branches of knowledge, which would not only be ornamental, but highly useful to us in the way of our sacred business; but the time allotted for this discourse will not allow me to enumerate them.

To conclude this head of discourse, let it be observed, that besides the great advantages of learning already mentioned, there are others not to be despised; a large field of science affords our minds a delightful scene, in which they may expatiate with pleasure: the pleasing projects and hopes of making improvement in this or the other branch of useful literature enliven life, and preserve it from that languor and deadness, to which it can scarce fail to be subjected, when it is not animated with some design, or directed to some valuable end: and, which is still of more importance, the thirst and pursuit of knowledge may contribute to preserve us from that immersion into worldly affairs, of which those must be in no small danger, who have not some employment for their leisure hours. To which may be added, that without a competent degree of knowledge, we can scarce escape falling into such blunders in our public appearances, as well as private conversation, as must expose us to the ridicule of the more knowing and ingenious part of mankind. But amidst all our speculative studies let us still remember, that all the improvements of the understanding, all the treasures of the

memory, all the ornaments of the imagination, must be made subservient to the purification of the heart ; which leads me to consider in the second place,

II. Those moral endowments which are required of us by the rule of the Apostle in the text, and which are absolutely necessary to fit us for the performing of the duties of our sacred office with faithfulness and success. As the heart is the seat of all the virtues, the whole improvement of it consists in cherishing and strengthening within our bosoms, all those virtues of the Christian life, which it is our duty to teach and recommend unto others. There is one disposition, which forms a principal part of that temper of mind, which becomes a minister of the gospel of Jesus, and has a mighty influence on his whole behaviour, and every part of his conduct, and therefore, should be cultivated by us with the utmost care, and that is, a noble elevation of soul above this present sensible world and all its transitory enjoyments : our hearts cannot be raised to this divine temper in any other way but by a full conviction, that all those things which the bulk of mankind love with so much ardor, and pursue with such keenness, can never make them happy ; and that the true happiness of life arises from the exercise of purity, sincerity, charity, piety, the consciousness of these virtues, the sense of the divine favour, and the ravishing prospect of a blessed immortality : that we may attain this real elevation of soul, we must accustom ourselves to a fre-

quent and lively contemplation of God, to a steadfast imitation of all his moral perfections, and to rejoice above all things in the humble and modest hope of being exalted to the perfect and everlasting enjoyment of him in an eternal world. For if we once felt and experienced the happiness that the contemplation of God, the resemblance of his moral perfections, and the sense of his friendship affords, there would spring from thence an unalterable persuasion, that life with all its other enjoyments, without these pure and spiritual pleasures, is but a vain dream, a transient shadow, a series of delusive amusements, which may flatter us for a while with fair and distant promises of happiness, but must soon leave us in disappointment and sorrow. Without this strong sense of the vanity and emptiness of all present and sensible things, and a clear view of the reality, importance and transcendent worth of spiritual and unseen objects, we are not prepared to descend into the world, and to encounter the temptations of it. It is this elevation of soul that must inspire us with a hearty contempt of that scrambling for worldly dignity and advancement, which must certainly be a great reproach to us, who inculcate upon others, that it ought to be their only ambition, to act their part well in that station Providence has assigned them, and to obtain the approbation of God, which is the perfection of glory and honour. It is this must preserve us from the mean and sordid design of scraping together wealth

and riches, which is utterly unbecoming us who call on the rest of mankind, to moderate their desires of these things, and whose business it is to persuade others, that the friendship of God, and those virtues and graces which form them to his resemblance, are the only real and durable riches; and it is this must secure ourselves from being dazzled with the shew and glitter of human life, while we preach unto others, that 'the fashion of this world passeth away,' and that spiritual and divine things alone shine with real and everlasting glory. It is the experience of the joys of a heavenly frame of mind that must prevent our mingling with the generality of mankind, in their low and sordid pursuits, and entering with vehemence into their little parties and factions, formed on worldly views and conducted by worldly measures. It is an high relish of the pleasures of the spiritual and divine life, which will seat us as it were in security on an eminence, from whence we may look down with wonder mixt with pity on the blinded sons of men, who like children are contending with the utmost keenness for baubles and toys, which dazzle their eyes for a while with a vain glare, but must soon vanish like a dream: in this situation of mind, and with this mournful view of the state of mankind, we must be animated with the warmest zeal to take the vail off their eyes and convince them of their ignorance.

What ignorance? I do not mean their ignorance of

the intimate nature and essences of things, their ignorance of the great plan of Providence, and of numberless past, present, and future transactions of the universe; in a word, I do not mean that ignorance of things, which is commonly acknowledged, even by the wisest philosophers, though no doubt that kind of ignorance is humbling enough; but I mean a more lamentable, more mortifying, more fatal ignorance; their ignorance of those things which are the proper privilege of man in his present state; their ignorance of the inherent baseness of vice, and the misery that is inseparable from it, and of the intrinsic excellence of virtue, and the happiness that always accompanies it; their ignorance of the vanity and nothingness of worldly pleasures, and the everlasting worth and importance of spiritual and divine enjoyments. In a word, their ignorance of this great and cardinal truth, 'that it is life eternal to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.' How pathetic and emphatical is the description we have of this blindness of mankind, Rev. iii. 17. 'Thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and stand in need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.' Let it be observed, that what is said here about the ignorance of mankind, is not to be understood, as if they had no theory or speculative notions about the chief good, and true happiness, for the greatest part of them have something of



this kind; but it is to be understood of their not having such an intimate and commanding conviction of this grand truth, that the only true happiness lies in the knowledge, the love, the resemblance, the enjoyment of God the sovereign good, as will make every other shadow of happiness quite disappear, and leave the mind in the full, and unalterable persuasion, that this spiritual happiness is all in all, for time and for eternity.

Besides the many great advantages already mentioned arising from a true elevation of soul above sensible things, we may add several more, such as, that it gives a real dignity to our inward character, a commanding influence to our example, an uncommon force and sublimity to our discourses, renders our business our chief delight and joy, and makes 'our light so 'to shine before men, that they seeing our good works, 'shall glorify our heavenly Father.' But the time allotted for this discourse will not permit us to enlarge on these.

Perhaps some may think, that the picture here given of that purity and elevation of heart, which becomes an instructor of mankind, is too high, and far beyond the life. But surely it must be owned, that it is our duty to aim at the highest pitch of virtue attainable in this present state. And a little attention may convince us, that we are capable of arriving at incomparably higher impressions of God and divine things



than we commonly feel. We may, by due care, and the aids of divine grace, rise to a pitch of esteem, admiration, love and joy in the contemplation of God, compared with which our ordinary sentiments and feelings are but like the faint impression made upon our minds by the idea of the sun when absent, compared with what we are conscious of, when we behold him shining in all his glory. Nay, is it not matter of wonder and astonishment, that we who believe, we who inculcate upon others, that there is almighty power, infinite wisdom and perfect goodness, perpetually presiding over the universe, and engaged on the side of righteousness and righteous persons, is it not, I say, very amazing, that by this belief our souls are not raised into a perpetual transport of joy and wonder, to something transcendently higher, than we have yet felt, than we can well express by all the power of language? Surely it must appear very surprizing to those who consider things calmly, that we who preach to others, that 'life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel,' and who profess to entertain the firm and unshaken hope of another and better life, are not established by that glorious hope in an uninterrupted and delightful exaltation of soul, above all those things which engross the hearts and employ the whole lives of worldly men. Can there be a more elevating, a more triumphant expectation, than that of living for ever in the abodes of perfect knowledge, virtue, and happi-

ness? is it not the natural effect of such a glorious hope, to deaden in us the love of this vain world, and make us pant after a better? '1 John iii. 3. Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure.' Let us endeavour then, by the proper helps of retirement, meditation and prayer, to attain clearer views of the Deity, and of divine things, to feel higher impressions of their worth and majesty, and to grow daily more convinced of their reality and importance, and of the joy and happiness that arise from the love and contemplation of them.

But let none conclude from what is said, that it is the duty of a minister of the gospel to devote his whole life to contemplation, to retire from the world, and maintain as little converse with mankind as an hermit shut up in his cell. By no means. The most perfect character of a teacher of true religion is, that of one who lives among mankind, converses with them, and at the same time retains as much purity of mind, and discovers as much disengagement of heart from the world, as if he were entirely separated from it. For such a man is fitted to moderate the desires of worldly things in the rest of mankind, to lower their high notions of the excellence and happiness which they imagine to arise from the possession and enjoyment of them, to display the superior worth and importance of those things which are spiritual and divine, and to spread a sense of God and religion wherever he goes, and with

whomsoever he converses : that this is the proper character of a teacher of true religion, is very evident : for this was the character of Jesus.

Before I finish this part of the discourse concerning that temper of mind, which is in a peculiar manner becoming us who are ministers of the gospel, and highly necessary to qualify us to fulfill the duties of our station, I must mention one important virtue, which should be cultivated with the greatest care, and raised to its highest pitch, and that is, an unfeigned goodwill and kind affection to our brethren of mankind. For this purpose, let us consider them in all those tender views, which may contribute to endear them to us, not only as children of the same great Parent of all, and as partakers of the same nature, but as creatures, fallen and degraded ; in the same state of ignorance, corruption and guilt ; as exiles in the same place of banishment from our native country, as fellow-sufferers in the same scene of misery and distress, as being equally liable to all the pains and calamities of this life, and equally subject to the stroke of death ; as fellow-travellers towards the same unseen world, as followers of the same great leader, and as having all the difficulties and hardships of our struggling state of pilgrimage, sweetned with hopes which depend on the same great friend and benefactor of human kind, even the hopes of mingling with the divine assembly above, and there triumphing for ever over all the miseries of

this mortal state. And if we lay open our souls to the full power of these interesting views of our fellow-creatures, we shall soon feel our hearts streaming out towards them in such a strong flow of tenderness and benevolence, as will extinguish the pride and vanity that is apt to arise from the little accidental advantages one man has above another. How is it possible, that our hearts should swell with pride, upon the account of any little transient superiority, when we reflect that we are all on a level in so many important circumstances, and that all worldly distinctions will soon be annihilated?

It is from these views too of our Christian brethren, that we shall feel our hearts melted down into a mild and forgiving temper. Has any one injured us? let us consider mankind in a just light, and it will immediately strike us, that the injury was done either through ignorance, or the impetuosity of some ungovernable passion. In both which cases, he that did the wrong is more properly an object of pity and compassion, than of anger and resentment. Besides, how can we continue implacable to others for those mistakes and workings of irregular passions to which we are liable ourselves.

To which we may add, as a thing of great importance, that it is from considering our brethren in these endearing views, that we shall feel ourselves inspired with the principles of true Christian moderation. When we observe others differing from us in opinion about

lesser points; or even, as it appears to us, erring from the truth in more important matters, it will immediately occur to us, we are all in a state of much darkness, and equally liable to mistakes and errors. If we revolve this one thought in our minds with due attention, it can scarce fail to soften our hearts, and move us rather with pity than passion and bitterness. Real love and affectionate sympathy, and just views of human nature, will lead us to reflect on all that vast variety of circumstances, which may prevail on honest and worthy minds, to embrace opinions widely different from those which we have espoused; and consequently will inspire us with an abhorrence of the unchristian practice of representing their mistakes and designs, as worse than they really are, and of judging harshly about their state in another world, and desiring or endeavouring to expose them to ill-usage in this. In one word, real love will invariably incline us to make the largest allowances for the infirmities of mankind, to judge charitably of the honesty and sincerity of their hearts and intentions, and to be more forward to proclaim their virtues than their mistakes and failings.

Further, one great advantage, arising from a mild and moderate conduct, is, that it places us in the most favourable situation for rectifying the mistakes and errors of those, who have unhappily fallen into them. As long as we discover a real tenderness for their interest and characters, we may justly hope they will



hearken to our reasons, and lay open their minds to conviction. But so soon as we betray anger and bitterness, or use them harshly, we thereby prevent all the effect of the strongest arguments. When we see, for instance, youth, through a fondness for novelty, and the rashness to which that season of life is liable, hurried away to espouse new opinions with great vehemence, and throw off established doctrines, before they have time to consider and understand them; if we then discover passion and resentment, we can never hope to have any power over their minds. But if we show them by the whole course of our behaviour, that we retain a sincere good-will to them, and a hearty concern for their interests; we may then perhaps prevail upon them to listen to our reasonings, and to suspend their forming any fixed judgment about the matter, until cooler thought, and more thorough examination make them fitter judges of things. The experience of mankind justifies this observation, a man of wisdom and moderation sometimes convinces and reclaims those who have been misled, but the wrath of man 'never works the righteousness of God,' nor can he ever hope to succeed in his designs, who acts counter the meek and humble spirit of our blessed Saviour. This deserves the serious consideration of all friends to truth and virtue, and especially of those who are any way concerned in the education of the rising generation.



Further, that general view of mankind presented to us above, will naturally lead us forward to consider our respective congregations, in a nearer and more interesting point of light, even as a certain portion of those fellow-travellers committed to our care through this journey of human life, and, by the appointment of providence, especially intrusted to us for direction, assistance and consolation. When we view our people in this new and endearing relation, as depending on us for instruction, when ignorant; for help, when distressed, and for comfort when afflicted, we must be very insensible if we do not feel a new flow of good-will towards them, a strong inclination to enter into their concerns, to take their pains and feelings upon us, and to watch for opportunities of doing them good. What though kind offices among them should take up much time, require much pains, put us to much real trouble and inconvenience, rob us of many agreeable amusements, and greatly interrupt delightful and useful studies? A sense of duty, love to our people, and the pleasure of doing good will reconcile us to all these hardships. A just sense of the important relations we stand in to our respective flocks, and a genuine feeling of that tender affection which is due to them will not allow us to hesitate one moment, whether that part of our time is most worthily employed which is taken up in doing real offices of friendship among them, or that part of it which is spent in perusing the finest writings of men

of the greatest genius that ever appeared in the world, or in polishing any little compositions of our own. Is the arranging of words, the measuring of periods, the beautifying of language, or even storing our own minds with the divinest sentiments, an employment of equal dignity and importance in itself, or equally pleasant on reflection, with that of composing differences, extinguishing animosities, searching out modest indigent merit, and relieving it, comforting a melancholy heart, giving counsel to a perplexed mind, suspending pain by our sympathy and presence, though it were but for a moment, suggesting to an unfurnished mind proper materials for meditation in the time of distress, or laying hold of a favourable opportunity of conveying valuable instructions and religious impressions to a mind little susceptible of them on other occasions? there is no need of saying any thing in confirmation of this; it was the glorious character of Jesus, 'that he went about doing good.'

That we may be still more animated to cherish a real and tender affection to the people committed to our care, let us consider that it must greatly increase our power of doing them good: a sincere good-will expressed by a constant series of kind offices, is the surest method of gaining the love and confidence of mankind: it is a powerful charm, which hardly ever fails to conquer every heart. Those of the meanest as well as those of the greatest capacity, per-

ceive it, and feel its force: even those who could not be won by any other methods, and who were perhaps determined to despise and neglect us, or thwart us in our designs, will not be able to stand out long against the power of uniform and unconquerable goodness. And when we have once been so happy as to gain the love and confidence of our people, it must be our own fault if they are not much bettered by us; for we have then ready access to their hearts; and our instructions either in public or private will be listened to with pleasure, and imbibed with eagerness: and our reproofs and admonitions when flowing from love, will be received not only without resentment, but with strong desires of amendment: so that we may succeed even beyond our expectations in promoting the eternal as well as temporal interest of the people of whom we have the charge. But let us remember not to abuse their confidence, by making use of it to carry on our own worldly designs, or to feed our vanity with their applauses, but employ it only for the noble and divine purposes of rendering them daily wiser, better and happier.

To conclude the illustration of this first rule, let us who are the ministers of the gospel of Jesus, carefully study that blamelessness of life, and that peculiar cast and turn of inward character, without which we can never discharge the duties of our important station, with pleasure to ourselves, or advantage to others.

And, in order to this, we must learn to dread and cautiously avoid that rock on which many split. The resting satisfied with an imaginary excellence of outward character, while they are conscious they possess but very low measures of that inward excellence, which alone can render them beautiful in the eye of God. Is it not almost incredible, that reasonable beings should labour so industriously and unweariedly to embellish and expose to view an imaginary self, whose whole existence is in the idea or breath of others, while they stupidly neglect to improve and adorn the real self within their own bosoms? Yet, strange as it is, daily observation puts it beyond all doubt, that great numbers of men endeavour, with the greatest eagerness, to crowd the appearances of all noble endowments and real virtues into their outward character, while they have not so much as made one sincere and vigorous effort to better their inward man. Is not this conduct just as vain and ridiculous, as if a man should be at the utmost pains to beautify a picture, and to make the whole world admire and applaud it as his exact likeness, while at the same time it had not the least resemblance of him; and his only safety from the utmost contempt, lay in hiding himself, and never allowing any one to compare the real ugliness and deformity of his person with the comeliness and beauty of his pretended image?

I remember a passage of an ancient author, in which

his folly of mankind is represented in a very strong light; 'I have often wondered, says he, how it should come to pass, that when every man loves himself more than others, yet every man should regard the opinions of others concerning him, more than his own: for if God or an angel standing by, should command any of us, to think nothing by himself, but what he should presently speak out, no man would be able to endure it for so much as one day. Thus we fear more what our neighbour will think of us, than what we think and know of ourselves.'

We proceed now to the second rule in the text, 'Take heed to thy doctrine.' What is necessary for explaining and illustration of this rule plainly arises from what has been said on the former. The proper improvement of the understanding already mentioned, will fit us for teaching the doctrines of religion: and the purity of the heart already described prepares and disposes us to inculcate the morals and duties of it.

I. As to the doctrines of religion, From the diligent and impartial study of the holy scriptures and natural religion, we shall be qualified to teach all those truths which are discoverable only by revelation, as well as those which the light of reason and revelation conspire to dictate. It cannot be called in question, but that by this rule, 'Of taking heed to our doctrine,' a principal thing required of us is to declare the whole scheme of Christianity so far as it is revealed, without

any mixture of human invention, in that plainness and simplicity in which it is delivered in the holy scriptures. That we may do this with greater faithfulness and impartiality, we must not represent Christianity as a chain of abstract speculations, and metaphysical truths linked together in a certain order, and in a certain form of words of human contrivance; but as a set of important facts, or remarkable scenes of the great plan of Providence, in which mankind are deeply interested, and which could not have been brought to light but by immediate revelation. When Christianity is represented in this view, it will not only make it more easily understood, but also more easily defended against the objections of its adversaries.

Thus, that mankind are at present in a state of ignorance, guilt and corruption, is a fact seen, felt and acknowledged. That Jesus Christ the Saviour is the only begotten Son of God, is delivered in scripture, in an easy manner, as a plain fact, '1 John iii. 16. God 'so loved the world, that he sent his only begotten 'Son, &c. Heb. i. 5. To which of the angels said he 'at any time, Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee.' It is further revealed to us, 'Col. i. '15, 16. that he is the image of the invisible God, 'the first-born of every creature, for by him all things 'were created, that are in heaven, and that are in 'earth, visible and invisible, that he is the head of all 'principalities and powers, Col. ii. 10. And that is



the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God, John i. 1.' Who can venture to deny any of these facts, and to assert there is no person existing to whom all those characters in their full, proper and highest sense may be ascribed? Who can pretend that his piercing eye hath surveyed the whole universe, and can declare that no such person exists? Who has presumption enough to affirm that he has seen through all the possibilities of things, and can assure us, that it is impossible any such person can exist?

'That the Word was made flesh,' is mentioned in scripture as another fact. His incarnation is no doubt a mysterious miraculous thing. Is not the incarnation of any spiritual being an inexplicable thing to us, and quite beyond the reach of our faculties? That he taught us the will of God by his doctrine, and set us a pattern of perfect virtue in his life, is another simple matter of fact easily comprehended. That by his humiliation, sufferings and death he made atonement for the sins of men; that as a reward of his extraordinary obedience and sufferings, 'he is exalted above every name;' that he now exercises a real, though invisible, dominion over the world, and that he will come to judge us at the last day in righteousness, are all delivered in scripture in an easy manner, as important parts of the great scheme of universal providence, and in which our highest interests are involved.

Now it must be acknowledged, that it is an indispensable part of our duty as teachers of the religion of Jesus, to declare these and all the other truths discovered to us by revelation. We cannot justify ourselves as having declared the whole counsel of God, if we overlook any of them, neglect to teach them, or treat them only in a transient and superficial manner: for these doctrines of Christianity are of the highest importance to mankind. Is it not of importance, of great importance, to creatures in a state of ignorance, corruption and guilt, to have it made known to them, by an undoubted revelation, that, in the original plan of the divine government, there is a remedy provided for their misfortunes? How comfortable and rejoicing is the discovery, that there is a particular dispensation of providence carrying on by the Son and Spirit of God, for the recovery and salvation of mankind, who are in a state of apostacy and ruin? Does it not mightily concern us to know those duties, and inward acts of religion which are due to Jesus Christ the Mediator, and the Holy Ghost the guide and sanctifier of mankind? Is it not beyond all contradiction, a matter of unspeakable importance, to have it confirmed to us by an infallible revelation, that this whole universe is one vast and immortal empire, of which God is the king and head; and that virtue and devotion are the great, the standing, and everlasting laws of this great kingdom, to which all rational beings ought to pay a voluntary

objection? Can it be denied to be of the highest consequence to us, to have the particular branches of these immutable laws, delivered to us by a messenger from heaven, vested with the highest authority; and not to be left to gather them from ancient traditions of an uncertain source, from long deductions of human reasonings, from the admonitions of philosophers, or even from the dictates of our own hearts, where there are such great mixtures of impurity? Is it not a mighty advantage to have all these rules of life exemplified in a perfect pattern, by one clothed with mortality, and who was in all points tempted like as we are, and yet without sin? Is it not a thing of universal acknowledged importance, to have it ascertained to us by one who came from the spiritual and unseen world, that the righteous shall live there in immortal happiness and glory, and that the wicked and disobedient shall be thrust down to a place of everlasting punishment? Is it not of importance to the world, that these great truths of Christianity should be imprinted on the minds of the present race of men, and transmitted down to succeeding generations! Is there a succession of teachers appointed in the Christian church for this very purpose? Let us then bethink ourselves, how we shall answer to the world, to our own consciences, and to God the Judge of all, if we fail in this great branch of our duty.

II. As to the duties of religion. This rule, 'Take heed to thy doctrine,' requires us to take heed how

we teach the duties of the gospel. That purity and elevation of heart which was recommended under the former rule, will both qualify and dispose us to teach and inculcate the whole compass of practical religion and morality, in the highest pitch of perfection attainable by mankind. It is of great consequence, to display a high standard of morals before the eyes of mankind; for nothing can be more dangerous, than to lower and accommodate it to the prevailing tastes or opinions of a degenerate age. If we come low, men will satisfy themselves with something still lower. Our Saviour has sufficiently directed our conduct in this matter, both by his doctrine and example, Matth. v. 48. 'Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,' Matth. xxii. 37. 39. His whole divine sermon on the mount, is a summary of pure religion, freed from all those corrupt glosses and abatements, which had been introduced to favour the corruptions of the human heart; and his life is a standing and visible pattern of the highest and purest virtue. Now, though we cannot expect that mankind will ever arrive, in this state of imperfection, to a perfect conformity to the divine law; yet it is of great use to set the sublime standard full in their view. For we can never upvail to mankind in a clear manner, their hidden hypocrisy and corruption, check the

growth of their secret pride, beget in them humility and lowliness of mind, and lead them to value justly the joyful doctrine of Christianity, that God accepts of sincerity, instead of perfection, through the propitiation of Jesus, unless we give them a full view of the purity and perfection of the divine law, and direct them to compare themselves impartially with it, and thus convince them, how far they fall below it. Besides, we can never explain the great doctrine of sincerity, as a term of our acceptance with God, in such a way as that it shall not be liable to many dangerous abuses, unless we represent a perpetual aim, and endeavour at a higher degree of perfection as the very essence, or at least, an inseparable property of it. Neither can we carry Christians forward in a constant progress toward perfection, unless we show them some pitch of it which they have not yet attained, to excite their desires and animate their endeavours.

But we must not leave this head without observing, that when we have set before our hearers the purest and highest standard of religion, it is our duty at the same time to admonish them not to rely too far on it. Men may have the justest and sublimest ideas of virtue and religion, and yet remain under the power of their guilty passions. Nay perhaps it is easier to frame the highest ideas of what is our duty in every circumstance of life, than to practise the lowest: all our ideas are only pictures or images of things in our imagination;



and what appears fair and beautiful to men in the theory, they are inclined to believe must have the possession of their hearts, and a mighty influence on their lives. But in this they are often fatally mistaken; for when we look around us in the world, there is nothing more observable, than that many who have formed the purest and worthiest conceptions of the divine perfections, continue in a great measure void of those devout affections of heart which are due to them: in like manner, many of those who display in their discourses and writings, the justest and noblest views of the native excellence of virtue and its importance to the happiness of mankind, make very melancholy discoveries in their life, that it has scarce any power over their hearts: as therefore they are apt to deceive themselves, fondly imagining that these things are inseparably connected together, which daily observation and experience convinces us are widely distant, it is certainly the business of those who are appointed their instructors, to guard them against such dangerous and fatal mistakes.

Again, the goodness of heart required and expected from us by the former rule, must lead us to remark with great concern, the manifold failures of mankind in the great duties of practical religion; and particularly to observe those failures which are most remarkable, and undisputed in the age or place of the world in which we live. Do we live in an age, when devo-

tion is fallen into disrepute, when whole sets of men discover many marks of indifference, and contempt of all serious appearances of true religion, and look upon pious dispositions as unnecessary, or superfluous ingredients of a worthy character. In such a situation of things, unaffected goodness will prompt us to suit our instructions to the temper of the age, and to dwell upon it strongly, that adoration, esteem, love, gratitude, trust and confidence are as really due to God, as good-will and acts of beneficence are due to men; that the relations betwixt God and his creatures are at least as real and immutable, as the relations betwixt one creature and another. That the purest and most durable joys of human life arise from the love of God, and an unbounded trust and confidence in his providence; nay, that without the love of God and trust in his goodness, there is a thick darkness spread over all things, and all rational security of joy is quite destroyed; that truth, integrity, and charity, and all the social virtues must want their great support, when there is no hope, no trust in an almighty being who delights in these virtues, and is the present friend, and will be the eternal rewarder of those who uniformly practise them; and that the want of just and rational piety towards God, whatever other virtues we may boast of, certainly shall not pass unpunished under his righteous administration.

Besides what is already said concerning the necessity and advantages of true devotion, there remains another

consideration of very great importance, namely, that not only the stable and uniform practice of all the virtues, but also the purity and perfection of them in the eye of God, depend in a great measure on a strong sense of infinite perfection, and what is due to it. For the illustration of this point, let us suppose a man, whose character is not only beautified with all the private virtues, truth, sincerity, justice, charity, temperance, fortitude; but also with all the public virtues, zeal for the common good of society, unwearied labours to promote it, and joy in the establishment and advancement of it: if such a person should contemplate his virtues with a selfish kind of delight, as his own productions, and the fruits of his own labour and industry, inwardly valuing himself on account of them, and secretly triumphing in his superiority to others, is it not evident, that this mixture of vanity and self-applause would greatly sully the beauty and diminish the worth of the character, in the judgment of God and every good being? Now, is there any such effectual method of bearing down that self-admiration, and self-complacency, which is so apt to arise from the view of any little excellencies we possess, as comparing them with the infinite perfections of the divine nature, (which must make them almost quite disappear,) and the habitual acknowledging from the bottom of our hearts, that it is God, who makes us differ from others, and bestows upon us all those virtues and talents, of which we are so unjustly proud, and

which we so vainly and foolishly ascribe to ourselves? Does not the viewing our graces, attainments and accomplishments in this light, show us the reasonableness, and equity of ascribing to God, and not to ourselves, all the praise and glory of them? We ought therefore to insist upon it, as an important and essential principle of religion, that as every good thing comes from God, it should be referred to him, and the whole honour and glory of it sincerely and perpetually ascribed to him: and that without this, there can be no perfect humility, no thorough greatness of soul, no stable, pure, disinterested virtue, no character entirely worthy and acceptable in the sight of him whose judgment is always according to truth. That this is not meer speculation, unsupported by experience and observation, might be made evident, if it would not protract the discourse too much: for upon a careful examination of the history of ancient and modern ages, it would appear that those who have been celebrated for a pure, disinterested and stable integrity and public spirit, were also remarkable for a pious veneration of the Deity, and a humble acknowledgment that their virtues, talents and successes were entirely owing to the goodness of his providence. That these considerations may have the greater weight, we must represent to our hearers in the strongest manner, that they are founded on the authority of divine revelation, and on this grand and undeniable truth, that the infinite goodness of God is the source of our exi-

stence and virtues, and of all that is great, lovely or good in any part of this vast universe, 'From the Father of lights cometh every good and perfect gift, and therefore, not unto us; not unto us, but to him be the glory.'

Further, it may be of singular use to represent the various acts of religion, in those amiable and inviting lights which may touch the heart. Thus, how pleasant a scene must it be, to behold a person of undoubted worth and virtue withdrawn from the noise and hurry of worldly affairs, all alone, silent, and solemn, lifting up his eyes to heaven, and fixing his thoughts on God his maker, devoutly acknowledging him with the warmest gratitude as the author of his being, the preserver of his life, the fountain of his present enjoyments, and the grand foundation of his future hopes, praying him to forgive his sins, to teach him his will, and to guide him forward in the paths of uprightness; and resigning himself without reserve to the disposal of his providence, and settling his mind in perfect peace by trusting firmly in him. Again, let us suppose a family living in peace, harmony, and the uniform practice of all virtue, regularly uniting their hearts and voices in hymns of praise to God with every morning's light, and when the shadows of the evening are stretched out, recalling their thoughts from the world, by a song of praise to 'him, who makes the outgoings of the evenings and the mornings to rejoice: and then hy-



ing themselves down to sleep in peace, because their God sustains them.' Let us likewise suppose larger and more numerous societies meeting together in religious assemblies, to pay their joint homage and adoration to the great parent of all, to celebrate his universal and never-failing goodness in joyful songs of praise, and to offer up their united and fervent prayers, that he may perpetually dispose them to walk uprightly, that he may be to them a sun and shield, may give them grace and glory, and withhold no good thing from them.'

Is there any thing unlovely or forbidding, any thing unworthy of human nature, in such exercises of devotion? Should we have reason to be ashamed, if we were found employed in them? Let us suppose we knew a country in which private and public acts of pure religion were in reputation, and regularly performed with solemnity, sincerity, and unaffected ardor; should we not love that country, and almost wish we were so happy as to live in such a joyful and devout society?

Let us farther suppose, that these devout worshippers discovered all the genuine marks and symptoms of inward devotion in their countenances and outward deportment. Could we justly express a contempt of them by calling them solemn grimaces, and hypocritical airs? Has not true devotion its just and natural features and signs in the human countenance, as well as

the social and friendly affections? However some people, who pretend to understanding and taste, may ridicule all the appearances and marks of devotion on the outward man; yet it must be acknowledged, even by those who consider things in no higher view than that of taste, that to be able to observe the native and just features of real devotion, and to represent them in poetry, statuary or painting, has always been esteemed one of the noblest efforts of a great and worthy genius. These things are sufficient evidences, that it is the voice of mankind, that devout affections are no ways dishonourable to human nature.

Further, if we feel the full power of pious dispositions in our own breasts, we shall be hence naturally led to make pathetic representations of them to others. Have we many inward and silent workings of heart towards God; are we really struck with the contemplation of the divine perfections displayed in his works, and in the revelations of his will; are our hearts really penetrated with a sense of his grace and goodness? Are our souls warmed with gratitude, love, and praise; do we feel an entire rest of mind on his providence and promises? Such a perfect rest of mind as banishes every disturbing thought, every anxious care, and produces a settled tranquillity within our bosoms? Can we triumph in the full security we have for all our valuable interests under his perfectly wise and righteous administration! Is the belief that God is,

and is the rewarder of all those who diligently seek him; is this belief like an immoveable rock, on which we stand safe and happy, amidst all the waves and billows that can roar about us? Are we continually gladdened with the glorious hope, that in some future period of our existence we shall know our God more fully, love him more ardently, and rejoice in him in a more sure and triumphant manner? Is this the inward state of our mind; then we shall find ourselves disposed to embrace all occasions of representing these delightful feelings in their full strength and force, and with that warmth and emotion, that may convince others, they are the genuine sentiments of our hearts: we shall not be afraid or ashamed to own them, but unfold them with freedom and boldness; describe them with a noble and manly assurance; and thus do our utmost to spread a sense of religion, in an unthinking and irregular age: whatever ridicule or contempt we may meet with; whatever names of superstitious or visionary enthusiasts may be bestowed upon us, let us stand by it, and maintain to the last, that the joys of religion are the sun, the light, the life and the consolation of our souls in all states, and amidst all the vicissitudes of human affairs; nay, let us insist upon it frequently and at full length, that the man, who can support life without the rejoicing persuasion that there is an almighty being at the head of all things, who is engaged on the side of virtuous and holy persons, who be-

friends them while here, and will render them and their virtues immortal, illustrious and triumphant hereafter, must either be quite insensible of the excellency of virtue, unconcerned about the eternal prosperity of those who love it and delight in it, or he must be so entirely immersed in pleasures, amusements, or worldly pursuits, as never to have made one calm and serious reflection. Thus let us count it our duty and honour, to be advocates for devotion in an age, when it is treated with so much indifference and contempt, using all that variety of arguments in its behalf that reason, revelation, or experience can suggest. And if devotion must leave our land, let us have the mournful honour of shewing amongst us its last and parting steps, so that posterity may be convinced it was not through the fault of those who were appointed the guardians and preservers of it.

Again, do we live in an age, when other sets of men think meanly, and speak contemptibly of truth, justice, charity, temperance, humility, and the rest of the great virtues of the Christian life? We must perpetually inculcate upon these, that no soundness in the faith, no solemnity of worship, no external observances, no flashes of devotion, no pretended inward manifestations, no zeal how warm soever for public matters, can ever compensate for the want of these essential ingredients of the spiritual life. And let us add, that on the practice of these virtues, the happiness of socie-

ty, and of individuals in a great measure depends. And to crown all, let us dwell upon it strongly, that righteousness, truth and goodness, are the chief glory of God himself, and what renders him the worthy object of the love and worship of his reasonable offspring; and therefore, these virtues must be the brightest ornament of his rational creatures.

Your time will not allow me to enter upon many other things very worthy of our consideration, which belong to this rule of taking heed to our doctrine, neither will it permit me to enter upon the explication of the third rule; 'Continue in them.' Before I proceed to the motives with which these rules are enforced, I must beg to be allowed a few words concerning the manner of our teaching. Here it must be our principal care to use plainness and simplicity, earnestness and sincerity. We must have no other view but to instruct and persuade those who listen to us, laying aside all affectation, all aims of gaining applause, or advancing any worldly interest. If we are actuated by any of these low motives, they will spoil the whole power, and prevent all the influence with which our discourses might otherwise be accompanied. If we would preach with any just hope of success, we must treat divine subjects with such sincerity and earnestness, as to forget ourselves; and convince our hearers, that we have no other view in speaking, but to stamp those virtuous and pious impressions on their hearts which we feel in our own. We must make it our perpetual care, to



confine and fix the attention of the hearer to the subject, and not to the speaker, by never suffering one turn of thought or expression to escape from us, that has no other view, than to please and shine. We must avoid with a particular care all affectation of fine language, and a glittering kind of eloquence, which whatever useless admiration it may raise in weak judges, must produce great contempt in more judicious ones. For those who have a just taste and true discernment, know, that a gaudy and florid style, how soft and agreeable soever, can never either touch the heart, or communicate distinct and strong views of divine truths; if we would attain to true eloquence, we must cherish an inward sense of the importance and excellency of sacred truths, and cultivate a strong feeling of all the virtues. For when our own hearts have once felt the warmth of divine things, it will be easy for us to transfuse it into the breasts of others; the inward feelings of a good heart have a natural eloquence accompanying them, which can never be equalled by laboured and studied ornament. The heart really and justly moved, never fails to dictate a language plain and easy, full of natural and continued vigour, which has nothing in it soft, nothing languishing, all is nervous and strong, and does not so much please the ear, as fill and ravish the soul. Further, let it be taken notice of as a thing of the utmost importance, that sincerity alone, and a real desire to instruct and persuade, will banish all affectation, either of sentiment or language. This is evi-

dent from the conduct of mankind in all circumstances where they are in earnest: for instance, a wise, virtuous, and pious parent, when he has a near prospect of entering into an invisible world, and only so much strength remaining as to enable him to give his last and dying instructions to his beloved children who stand weeping around him, will he study to express himself with artificial eloquence, and industriously search for glittering ornament? Surely he will not: or if he should; how absurd, nay, how shocking and monstrous would his conduct appear to every impartial spectator! The application is easy, and there is no occasion for insisting on it. Allow me to conclude this part of the discourse with observing what has been hinted at above, that this divine eloquence cannot be acquired by human learning, and skill in the choice, and arrangement of words, but by a powerful feeling of what is great and good, produced in us by the holy Spirit of God.

I come now to the second general head proposed, to consider the motives enforcing the exhortation, and there are two of them, '1. In doing this, thou shalt save thy own soul.' It is proper to observe, that we are under two different sorts of obligation, the one is to perform all those duties which belong to our private station, as we are men and Christians, the other is to perform such duties as belong to that public station, wherein providence has placed us. Both of these are equally necessary to complete a truly good and worthy

character. Thus, though a judge should be quite blameless in the whole tenor of his private behaviour, yet, if he neglects, through carelessness and indolence, to embrace many opportunities of dispensing justice, and of promoting the welfare of society, by his influence and authority, he would be highly blameable, perhaps as highly blameable, as if he had failed to do justice in private life, and could not reasonably expect to escape that punishment from the great Judge of all, which such a criminal omission deserves. In like manner, though a minister behaves himself with unspotted virtue and innocence in private life, yet if he has no zeal for answering the end of his office, if he spends that time in indolence and idleness, or even in acquiring real knowledge, which ought to have been employed in doing good offices among his people, or in preparing himself to instruct them in a more convincing manner; he cannot expect that he shall be acquitted at the last, either by his own conscience, or God who is greater than conscience.

It deserves to be remembered as a matter of great importance, and as a very awful consideration, that negligence or carelessness about the duties of our public station, may have more dreadful consequences under the government of a righteous judge than we are ordinarily aware of. The criminal omission or careless performance of the duties belonging to a public character and station, may be as hurtful to the great interests of mankind in this or another life, as positive acts

of vice and unrighteousness: so that none of us can be assured, but they may be followed by as severe chastisements in this world, or as dreadful punishments in another. If we allow the impressions of God and religion to wear out of our peoples minds, by our careless or indifferent manner of instructing them; several generations may pass away before they can be renewed. If we sow the seeds of folly and superstition among them, through a blind mistaken zeal, it may take the labours of wise and good men for several ages to root them out. May not that long train of mischiefs which take their rise from our negligence, or misguided zeal, be justly charged upon us? If we either neglect to instruct our people, or mislead them, can we be free from the blood of the present or succeeding generations?

When therefore we ascend our pulpits, behold a listening congregation around us, let us ask ourselves seriously, as in the sight of God, whether the doctrines we are intending to deliver have a real tendency to make them wiser and better, to enlighten their minds, purify their hearts, or reform their lives? And if we are conscious that their tendency is good, let us again ask ourselves, whether we are about to utter such powerful and striking sentiments, as the subject will admit of, and as a more careful preparation might have suggested to us? Have we such an affecting and commanding sense of divine things on our minds, as will awaken and engage the attention of the hearers, efface

the worldly impressions that have been made on their minds through the week, enter into their affections and inspire them with a contempt of earthly enjoyments, and kindle in them the love, esteem, and admiration of the things which are heavenly and divine. And as to the general conduct of our lives, let us seriously ask ourselves, have we done all we ought to have done, might have done to alleviate, or in some cases to annihilate, and in many cases entirely prevent many of the miseries of our people, by tender offices of compassion, benevolence and humanity? Or have we done all that might have been done by persons in our circumstances, and with our abilities (whatever they are) to propagate a true sense of virtue and religion among mankind? Or have we done as much, as has been done this way by those who were in as unfavourable circumstances, and had not superior abilities? Can we pretend to faithfulness in our office, if we do not honestly endeavour to do our utmost to promote the welfare and happiness of mankind; or can we reasonably expect the salvation of our souls, if we are not faithful to the utmost?

The second motive is, 'That we shall save the souls of them that hear us.' The former motive urges us to take heed to ourselves and our doctrine for our own sakes: the latter is of a more generous and disinterested kind, recommending it to us to take care of ourselves and doctrine for the sake of others. If we feel the force of this double obligation, we shall watch over ourselves with double care and diligence. As no



thought can be more terrifying, than that the souls of mankind should perish, through the example of our unholy lives, or through our careless or corrupt doctrine; so on the other hand, no consideration can be more rejoicing and triumphant, than that they should be saved by means of that worthy example we set before them, and those pure and heavenly lessons of virtue and piety we honestly impart to them. Since the soul of man is the most excellent piece of the divine workmanship in this lower world, since it surpasses far in dignity and excellence the whole fabric of the visible creation, it must undoubtedly be a most glorious employment to promote its worth, its welfare, and eternal prosperity. It is impossible to conceive a more divine employment, than to maintain a command and power over the minds of men by the force of truth and virtue; for this is in some degree to resemble God himself, the author and inspirer of every good and perfect gift: to be instrumental in making reason and virtue to prevail in the hearts and lives of mankind, is an office no less honourable than that of being a fellow-worker with God in his grand design of establishing the happiness of his creation. Besides the dignity of the work itself, let us lift up our thoughts to the everlasting honour and reward that attends it in the other world, 'For they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.' To

conclude, let us endeavour, in a humble dependance on the holy spirit of God, who favours and seconds every worthy design, to take such care of ourselves and of our doctrine, as that we may have 'many to be our crown' of rejoicing at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and may at last hear that joyful sentence passed upon us, 'Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord.'

I am very sensible, that I ought to have acknowledged before this, my own unfitness to speak so much from this place, and with the air of an instructor, before so discerning an audience, before so many reverend fathers and brethren, under whom it would have become me better to sit as a humble hearer. The task was neither my choice, nor desire, but imposed upon me. I have endeavoured according to my small ability, to represent a few things concerning the temper and duty of a minister of the gospel, which appeared to me of great importance, and which I find great need to inculcate frequently on my own mind: I shall rejoice, greatly rejoice, if I be found to be the only one who has any occasion to be reminded of them.

Having exhorted my reverend fathers and brethren to take heed how they teach, allow me now to call on you the people to take heed how ye hear: we may justly invite you to listen to our instructions with an unprejudiced mind, and a sincere intention to know the will of God that ye may do it. To this end hearken to us with humbleness of mind, with a deep sense of your

want of divine knowledge, or at least of your great need to have the impressions of divine things renewed and more deeply engraved on your hearts: hearken to us also with a strong sense of your manifold hidden corruptions of heart, or at least of your want of that pitch of purity and spiritual-mindedness which becomes the followers of Jesus Christ. In this favourable state of mind, lay open your souls to the light of divine truth, and to the lively impression of heavenly and eternal objects: seriously consider what ye hear, and honestly apply it. The main hindrance to your receiving real advantage from sacred instructions, is the want of that simplicity and honesty of heart, which would lead you to consider every rule of life, every admonition, every enforcement of duty, as something that concerns yourselves in particular, and may be of use to mend your hearts or better your lives. There is nothing more observable among mankind, than a certain careless humour of looking upon religious instructions, as not belonging to themselves, but only to the rest of the world. Perhaps indeed they will not entirely disregard them: possibly they may listen to them with pleasure, treasure them up in their memories, speak of them afterwards with something of warmth and emotion, admire the justness of them, applaud the preacher, and express great surprize and wonder, that the rest of mankind do not apply them to correct the disorders of their hearts and irregularities of their lives. But they never allow themselves to re-

fect, that those very instructions which they apply to others, might be highly useful to themselves. Consider, that it is not enough that you approve of the discourse and applaud the speaker; applause will not satisfy a sincere instructor, he requires more substantial praise, your reformation and amendment: what a mortifying disappointment is it to a faithful teacher, to meet with nothing but empty praise from his hearers, when he intended, wished and expected to have inspired them with worthy resolutions, or engaged them in generous undertakings! To conclude, remember that it will more effectually animate your ministers in their public ministrations, to be assured, that there is one person in their several congregations listening to them with an earnest desire to learn his duty, that he may practise it, than to know that all the rest are applauding them: and that it will rejoice their hearts more to find that they have been so happy as to convey one important instruction, or rivet one worthy impression, than to be surrounded with the praises of the most numerous and discerning audience.

May the ministers of the gospel of Jesus, be taught to teach, and you to hear in such a manner, that we may be mutual comforts to one another in this present world, and at last meet together in the divine assembly above, to live in immortal friendship with one another, and in eternal communion with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

F I N I S

